

# Amebiasis

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## What is amebiasis?

Amebiasis is a disease caused by a one-celled parasite called *Entamoeba histolytica*.

## Who gets amebiasis?

Although anyone can have this disease, it is more common in people who live in tropical areas with poor sanitary conditions. In the United States, amebiasis is most often found in travelers to and immigrants from these areas, as well as in people who live in institutions that have poor sanitary conditions.

## How common is amebiasis?

Only about 10% to 20% of people who are infected with *E. histolytica* become sick from the infection. Those people who do become sick usually develop symptoms within 2 to 4 weeks, although this may range from several weeks or longer.

## How do you get amebiasis?

Amebiasis is transmitted by:

- Putting anything into your mouth that has touched the stool of a person who is infected with *E. histolytica*.
- Swallowing something, such as water or food, that is contaminated with *E. histolytica*.
- Touching and bringing to your mouth *E. histolytica* cysts (eggs) picked up from surfaces that are contaminated with *E. histolytica*.

## What are the symptoms of amebiasis?

The symptoms often are quite mild and can include loose stools, stomach pain, and stomach cramping. Amebic dysentery is a severe form of amebiasis associated with stomach pain, bloody stools, and fever. Rarely, *E. histolytica* invades the liver and forms an abscess. Even less commonly, it spreads to other parts of the body, such as the lungs or brain.

## How is amebiasis diagnosed?

Your health care provider will ask you to submit stool samples. Because *E. histolytica* is not always found in every stool sample, you may be asked to submit several stool samples from several different days. Also, *Entamoeba histolytica* and another amoeba, *Entamoeba dispar*, which is about 10 times more common, look the same when seen under a microscope so it is hard to sometimes identify which one it is.

## What is the treatment for amebiasis?

Several antibiotics are available to treat amebiasis. A physician must prescribe treatment. You will be treated with only one antibiotic if your *E. histolytica* infection has not made you sick. You probably will be treated with two antibiotics (first one and then the other) if

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your infection has made you sick.

## How can amebiasis be prevented?

When traveling to countries with poor sanitation:

- Drink only bottled or boiled (for 1 minute) water or carbonated (bubbly) drinks in cans or bottles.
- Do **not** drink fountain drinks or any drinks with ice cubes. Another way to make water safe is by filtering it through an "absolute 1 micron or less" filter **and** dissolving chlorine, chlorine dioxide, or iodine tablets in the filtered water. "Absolute 1 micron" filters can be found in camping/outdoor supply stores.
- Do **not** eat fresh fruit or vegetables that you did not peel yourself.
- Do **not** eat or drink milk, cheese, or dairy products that may not have been pasteurized.
- Do **not** eat or drink anything sold by street vendors.

## How do I get more information on amebiasis?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Phone: 800-CDC-INFO

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/amebiasis/>

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

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